



## Calhoun: The NPS Institutional Archive

---

Faculty and Researcher Publications

Faculty and Researcher Publications

---

2004-07

# Writing, Authenticity, and Knowledge Creation

Suchan, Jim

---

py Suchan, J. Writing, Authenticity, and Knowledge Creation, Journal of B Communication, 41(3), pp. 302-315, 2004.

<http://hdl.handle.net/10945/40194>



Calhoun is a project of the Dudley Knox Library at NPS, furthering the precepts and goals of open government and government transparency. All information contained herein has been approved for release by the NPS Public Affairs Officer.

**Dudley Knox Library / Naval Postgraduate School**  
**411 Dyer Road / 1 University Circle**  
**Monterey, California USA 93943**

<http://www.nps.edu/library>

# WRITING, AUTHENTICITY, AND KNOWLEDGE CREATION

## Why I Write and You Should Too

Jim Suchan

*The Naval Postgraduate School*

I have never thought of myself as a researcher. The words “Outstanding Researcher Award” on the plaques the Association for Business Communication (ABC) and McGraw-Hill/Irwin awarded me this past year don’t describe who I am and what I believe I do. Those words, in fact, cause me uncomfortableness, even embarrassment. I deliberately avoid describing myself as a researcher, let alone a “social scientist.”

It has taken me well over a decade of my academic life to figure out what I do, aside from teach. Simply put, I write, or write articles. More precisely, I struggle to find time to write, avoid writing more times than I care to admit because it’s hard work, puzzle over how to “word and reword” (Rose, 1992) the organizational world I’m thinking about, and, more often than not, think and write badly. Not until the mid-1990s did I discover that what I am compelled to write are stories about communication problems I’ve stumbled across, the ways I’ve used to solve them, and the problems that still puzzle me. Telling stories feels authentic and enables me to continue writing, even though tenure and promotion are no longer rewards for my writing efforts.

This article describes my experiences and beliefs about academic writing in general and, more specifically, writing business and managerial communication stories. I will tell you a story that explains why I think of myself as a storyteller rather than a researcher and the extraordinary effect this change of thinking has had on my attitude toward writing and my ability to write. Before explaining why I chose this approach, I break with storytelling tradition by revealing my goals for telling this story.

---

Jim Suchan (Ph.D., The University of Illinois, 1980), is an associate dean and professor of managerial communication in the Graduate School of Business and Public Policy at The Naval Postgraduate School. This article is based on the Outstanding Researcher Award lecture given at the 2003 Association for Business Communication Conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Dr. Jim Suchan, Graduate School of Business and Public Policy, The Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA 93943; e-mail: jsuchan@nps.navy.mil.

Journal of Business Communication, Volume 41, Number 3, July 2004 302-315

DOI: 10.1177/0021943604265952

© 2004 by the Association for Business Communication

My story has four goals. The first is to urge those of you who don't write, who may be afraid or lack the confidence to write because you believe you lack the rigor of social scientists and researchers, to consider reframing your professional selves and actions so that you'll be able to see yourselves as active writers who regularly publish your ideas. This goal is important because it strikes me that the ABC has become increasingly an organization in which its members talk—often presenting provocative, interesting ideas about myriad aspects of communication at our conferences and in informal conversations with each other—but don't write.

My second goal is to closely connect writing with effective teaching. For me, effective teaching is the art of weaving for learners a coherent story about communication. For that story to have power and impact, I believe we have to create, to write, part of that story.

My third goal is to begin a conversation about the kind of writing worth publishing that doesn't fit snugly into our current interpretation of a "research article." In sociology and subdisciplines of management, this conversation has already begun and has resulted in writing that breaks traditional research article structures: for example, dialogues, analytical narratives, autoethnographies, and interviews with embedded analyses (Tedlock, 2000). These innovative genres have created a new intellectual and emotional writing space that has enabled writers to better connect their academic work with their personal lives. Writers now can blend or integrate in their writing the professional "other" who is objective, rational, and analytical with the highly personal self who can describe the passion that draws a writer to a project, the confusion that often occurs while gathering and thinking about data, the exhilaration of discovering connections and relationships, and at times the self-doubt about the value of a project or the ability to complete it. This connection has energized writers to create work that is challenging to read, see, and think about.

My fourth goal is personal, therapeutic, and, quite frankly, self-indulgent. I have been a full-time administrator for 3 years. For me, finding time to write, to tell the stories about communication puzzles that interest me, to experiment with different ways of telling these stories, has become increasingly difficult. In short, I'm in a quandary about two different career choices—a career as a senior-level administrator or as an academic. Creating the narrative shape of this story has required me to think very deliberately and write carefully about why I write. This process of meaning creation will, I hope, help me understand how I want to spend the last 10 to 15 years of my career.

### **WHY A STORY**

This story is an autoethnography. Ellis and Bochner (2000) describe autoethnographies as "highly personalized stories about the writers' lived experience that relate the personal to the cultural" (p. 739). To achieve the goals I just described, I intend to connect my struggles, doubts, and development as a writer with my interpretation of ABC's writing and research culture. Although my

development as a writer may seem idiosyncratic because of my career path choices, I believe I am a representative figure for the struggles that many, perhaps most, of you have undergone. To use a rhetorical analogy, I believe I am a synecdoche—by and large the story of my doubts, insecurities, and attempts, often failed, to write authentically rather than for some evaluating “other” (tenured colleagues, journal editors and reviewers, promotion committees) is typical, indeed ordinary, for many people in our area, particularly for those who have crossed from English departments to business schools.

---

I succumbed to the institutional or community structures of doing “objective research” and the constraints of form and style that characterize the traditional research article.

---

In a recent *Harvard Business Review* article, Robert McKee (2003), a screenwriter, well describes the value of storytelling. He states that “stories fulfill a profound human need to grasp the patterns of living—not merely as an intellectual exercise, but within a very personal, emotional experience” (p. 52). That stories deal with emotion helps make them persuasive and causes them to resonate within us over time. Furthermore, because most stories are narratives, although often fragmented ones, their constructed patterns help the teller/writer and the listener/reader to make sense of events. As Barrett (2003) points out, that sense-making occurs because stories put motives and reasons for choices within a developmental context. So, this story is about writing and research patterns I’ve noticed, the intellectual and emotional authenticity those patterns had for me, and my own intellectual and emotional sense-making of my motives and choices about the kind of articles I wrote and continue to write.

Finally, this story is a paradox; it’s a fiction infused with emotional truth. The story is fiction for obvious reasons: It’s rhetorically staged—I’ve wrestled information into a thematically organized, coherent narrative so that the messiness is cleaned up, I’ve left out information so the narrative isn’t overly cumbersome, and the “I” presented is a creation or construction. A cubistic story about me and writing from multiple points of view—those of my coauthors, colleagues, journal editors and reviewers, my wife, my daughter, and others—would provide a more encompassing story because these different points of view would move us outside my situational limitations and my interpretation of me. But I’m not that daring or talented to write that story—at least not yet. I claim this story is true for one simple reason: The self I describe feels authentic to me today.

I organize this story from the inside out, from the very personal to the public or collective. First, I will discuss my attempts to be a “researcher” or “social scientist” and the feelings of inauthenticity those metaphors created. Second, I describe how the process of reframing myself as someone who tells communication stories created excitement about writing and transformed the way I taught. Within that section, I also explain briefly why writing gives us power, an opportunity to individually and cojointly create an intellectual and professional world that has value to ourselves, students, and businesspeople. Finally, I suggest changes that journal gatekeepers can make to help ABC members reframe their writing selves.

### WRITER OF STORIES VERSUS RESEARCHER

Between 1982 and 1989, I wrote for two reasons: to overcome the fear that I neither had the skill nor the talent to write for publication and to get tenure. Getting articles out the door and published in journals—both academic and practitioner—was one of my primary concerns. The other was developing confidence that I could write professionally. The doubts I had about my ability to get published not just once but regularly partly resulted from my shift in disciplines from English Literature to Business and Managerial Communication and a change from working in English departments to business schools.

The education I received at the University of Illinois while pursuing a Ph.D. in Victorian Literature well prepared me to think critically about texts and to analyze and synthesize information from secondary sources. But I didn’t trust the value of that ability or believe in my gut that those capabilities would serve me well as a full-time academic in a business school. Instead, I felt I was entering a foreign country whose language and way of thinking I had only cursory knowledge of. To my detriment, I focused on what I lacked—knowledge of a variety of research methods, a firm grasp of the characteristics of an air-tight research design, and understanding of statistical techniques—rather than what I was good at.

A greater cause of my doubt were the metaphors my business school colleagues used to talk about themselves and their work. They described themselves as researchers and social scientists and spoke confidently about research questions, hypothesis testing, research design, data analysis, and a number of other terms and concepts suggesting that scientific knowledge was “out there” and that they had the skills to find it. In addition, the metaphors they used to critique their work implied they were the architects of frameworks or structure that resulted in the discovery of knowledge and truth. Questions I often heard, and, by the way, still hear, are “What theoretical *framework* are you using?” “What’s the *design* of your research?” “What *support* do you have for your theory?” “How can you better use your theory as *scaffolding* for your data analysis?” and “How can you *shore up* your weak theoretical *framework* so you can better *support* your data analysis?”

These architectural metaphors and the thinking they encourage suggest that a research article is an artifice or an object that “contains” knowledge. My colleagues

had the heartfelt belief that as researchers they could design the plans to capture knowledge and construct the artifice that communicated that knowledge to others. Furthermore, they expressed no doubt about the value of their approach or their work: They were certain that knowledge was cumulative and linear. In short, “the truth was out there,” and they had the tools to find it.

These metaphors about research impressed and intimidated me, yet seemed limited. But I wanted to join the business school researcher community to prove that I was as smart as “they” were, to dispel myths about “touchy-feely” liberals arts types from English departments, and to get promoted and tenured. Consequently, I entered what DiMaggio and Powell (1983) call “the iron cage” (p. 148). In other words, I succumbed to the institutional or community structures of doing “objective research” and the constraints of form and style that characterize the traditional research article.

But for me, this was a deal with the devil. At the time I didn’t realize the psychological effect producing so-called “objective research” would have on me. The work I published during that time had research questions, a literature review, descriptions of research design, data, often statistical analyses of that data, and a discussion of results. Although the work appeared to others to have “social science rigor” (it did get published), to me it didn’t feel authentic. I felt I was a fraud engaged in an elaborate language game.

That work was on readability formulas and collective bargaining agreements. Although that work helped me to get tenure, I wish I could disown it. I had to do something different.

In the mid- to late 1980s, Ron Dulek and I submitted a think piece, an essay, on reader analysis to the *Journal of Business Communication (JBC)*. At that time *JBC* was a “folksy” journal that was “inward,” that is, ABC-directed. Everyone associated with ABC seemed welcomed: graduate students, faculty, and (I believe) even practitioners published in *JBC*. As long as someone had a good or clever idea that he or she could clearly communicate, *JBC* would publish the piece. As a result, *JBC* issues contained an eclectic array of articles: essays, rants, think pieces, pedagogical articles, empirical studies, and case studies.

*JBC* published our essay on reader analysis—the reviews were kind and helped build confidence (Suchan & Dulek, 1988). More important, Ron and I had fun writing the article not only because we like each other and work well together but also because we were able to use our strengths—synthesis and analysis—we had developed as Ph.D. students in English departments. For the first time in a long time, I felt I was giving readers the best I was capable of, and I had a fleeting vision of writing possibilities, of what might be, if I continued to develop those strengths.

*JBC* readers seemed to like the article. It has been cited a number of times in other articles and a handful of instructors have included it in their teaching course packets. The article, however, does not have research questions, a research design section, and any “real” data. I doubt if it could get published today.

In the late 1980s, *JBC* editors decided to toughen the journal by strengthening the review process and demanding greater social science rigor in the form,

methodology, and content of its articles. The editors' motives were pure. They wanted colleagues in business schools and editors of other journals to regard *JBC* as having rigor. Furthermore, they wanted to attract submissions from researchers in other management-related fields. Finally, they wanted promotion and tenure committees to view *JBC* publications as quality, representing an "A" journal. In short, the editors wanted *JBC* to be admitted to the "men's hut" of management and social science journals. I believe this change created unintended consequences.

Initially, the form that *JBC*'s increased rigor took appeared to be limited to largely empirical work. The number of quantitative articles increased, academics from other disciplines began publishing in *JBC*, and the content and structure of articles mirrored that of traditional management journals. Clearly, *JBC*'s voice had changed. However, many ABC members thought the articles were of limited value because these pieces used research designs and statistical analyses beyond their understanding. ABC members complained loudly at national and regional meetings. Members were intimidated by their own journal.

I, too, experienced the pain of that transition. Ron and I had just finished an essay, "A Situational View of Clarity," whose claims were supported by Ron's consulting work and my data about perceptions of clarity gathered from Naval officers. Although the process of writing the article was difficult—drafts and revisions of the article were written during 18 months in airport restaurants and hotel rooms in Los Angeles, Atlanta, and New Orleans, Louisiana, the work energized us. Once again, we were playing to our strengths: synthesizing information from consulting and military environments and applying the results of that synthesis to an area—written communication clarity—that the field had oversimplified.

We liked the finished product, thought it made some valuable points about clarity that were well supported, strongly believed it should be published, and submitted it to *JBC*. About a month or 2 later we received a curt letter from the *JBC* editor rejecting the article because what we submitted was not research and, by implication, that we were not researchers. Ironically, there were two reviews attached that were quite favorable about the article. We were livid. Our goal was simple: We wanted the article published because we believed it had something important to say. At a regional ABC conference I cornered the editor and asked for a more detailed explanation why the article should not at least be a revise and resubmit, given the comments from the two reviewers. The editor stated in no uncertain terms that our article was not research and that it would not be published, despite what the reviewers wrote—it did not have a research question or a hypothesis, there was no research design, and our data were anecdotal. I walked away angry and shaken.

Although we did get the article published in *Management Communication Quarterly*'s (*MCQ*'s) "Commentary" section (Suchan & Dulek, 1990), the experience had significant impact on me. The business communication journals, or at least *JBC* and later *MCQ*, were embracing the research norms of "management science." I once again started focusing on what I was not trained well to do rather than what I was good at. To remedy my deficiencies, I seriously thought about enrolling in a series of statistics courses, spent time reading about research design (a very



worthwhile experience), and stewed about whether I could publish articles that did not conform to the dominant research norm.

Most important, I didn't realize that I was framing writing from a deficiency standpoint. That perspective, which unfortunately sharpened in focus, resulted in my not publishing anything significant for about 4 years. I abandoned two major writing projects, think pieces about the relationship between Group Decision Support Systems and communication, because they did not conform to the research model gaining strength in our journals. I strongly believe the business communication journals' shift to publishing articles that reflected management science research norms had significant impact on business/management communication writers. Conversations I had with ABC members at national and regional conferences indicated they were intimidated by the expectations the journals had established and believed they didn't have the tools to write for these journals. In short, they too framed writing and publishing from a deficiency perspective.

The unintended consequence of our journals embracing this management science rigor was that many ABC members stopped writing. Next I explore in more detail the reasons why that occurred and link those reasons back to my own story.

### **WHY ABC MEMBERS DON'T WRITE**

Of course, heavy teaching loads and paper grading responsibilities sap energy from ABC members, making it difficult to find time to write. However, I believe the following are root causes that help explain why ABC members don't write

- dysfunctional personal stories or narratives about being a "researcher" or "social scientist" that generate limiting, unhealthy metaphors about writing;
- difficulty connecting writing, learning, and teaching—writing is seen as an end in itself rather than integral to teaching and learning; and
- lack of outlets to publish different, nontraditional types of writing.

Many of us have constructed for ourselves a dysfunctional story or narrative about writing articles. That dysfunctionality results partly from the metaphors we use—we call what we try to do "research" rather than writing articles, writing for publication, or simply writing. I also believe many of us see research as a way of "finding" or "uncovering" business or organizational communication "truths" we have unearthed through careful research methods. Implicit in this belief is that we need to be doing "science" or "social science," that we are obligated to communicate what Condorcet calls "knowledge of the truth" (quoted in Levine, 1985, p. 6). Doing "social science" or research implies authority, objectivity, clarity, order, control, and generalizability. That strikes me as heavy baggage to carry into the writing process. In fact, I believe this baggage causes many professionals, particularly those new to the field, to never begin the writing journey or to stop a short distance along the way.



Furthermore, the stylistic norms we adhere to and further reinforce through our use refine ourselves out of existence and thus further reinforce the perception that we must be objective, clear, and in control. As a result, often the self or the "I" must disappear or be only nominally present in the text. The third person omniscient point of view we believe we are required to embrace creates a Wizard of Oz–like voice that hides the messiness, confusion, false starts, subjectivity, fear, insecurity, and the range of other characteristics and emotions that define the article writing process. To many of us, that voice feels restrictive and sounds untruthful, inauthentic.

Not until 1993 to 1994 did I escape from the story and metaphors that I've just outlined. As I have already indicated, for about 4 years I had been unable to finish a significant writing project. I didn't believe in what I was doing. I was in a funk, a deep funk. All I wanted to do was teach, read good books, travel, be an interesting husband, and help my 10-year-old daughter grow up. Yet I emerged from that funk. Let me share with you how.

While on jury duty, I was fiddling in a disheartened way with some qualitative data I had gathered from a project I was doing for Defense Investigative Services. It struck me that field agents who wrote reports of investigation composed interesting, although extremely difficult to read, stories and that they used some odd metaphors to describe themselves and their work. At that time I was rereading some of the new journalists—Tom Wolf, Joan Didion, Hunter Thompson, and Norman Mailer, as well as the postmodern novelists Robert Coover, Don DeLillo, and William Gass (I was following through on my desire to read good books). Also, a new colleague of mine, Frank Barrett, had given me his work on generative metaphor and change.

I'd like to report that I experienced an epiphany as a result of the constellation of factors I just described. Unfortunately, that's not the case. During the next several months, however, several things became clearer to me. The distinction between fiction and nonfiction is false. As novelists like E. L. Doctorow, new journalists like Joan Didion (Fishkin, 1985), and, currently, an increasing number of management writers state, there is only narrative. Barrett and Cooperrider's work (1990) focused me on the power of metaphor in organizational change and gave me a useful bibliography from which I developed a theoretical framework for thinking about metaphor within organizations. More important, I became much more self-conscious of the metaphors and the frames I had been using to think about my professional work, the discomfort and inauthenticity those metaphors caused me, and the limitations those metaphors placed on my thinking and action. I took very seriously that words—the internal dialogue I created and recreated—do generate worlds, and that I had significant responsibility in changing or reshaping the words I used to create a world that felt authentic. To put it another way, my reliance on others' words to define my writing self caused me to make myself a victim. That had to stop.

These ideas about metaphor began reshaping me professionally. First, I saw the Defense Investigative Services data in a new, more revealing, and exciting way. Specifically, I recognized, perhaps invented or constructed, communication

relationships that I and many others in our field had not noticed. Also, I saw my own role of an article writer in a new way. I stopped worrying about being objective, ensuring that I had social science rigor in my work, and being concerned that my work measured up against other researchers. I stopped trying to be someone I was not. Instead, I saw myself as a writer who told a story about a communication puzzle, problem, or dilemma that I thought was interesting and valuable to share with others. Through analysis, use of theory, and speculation I offered a solution, recommendations, or observations about these problems or dilemmas. In short, I reframed my thinking about research and writing.

After finishing the article, I found I wanted to tell other stories, write other articles. Furthermore, I found myself writing longer articles, telling more complex stories with more detailed commentary. Also, I learned to see theory as part of the storyline—a kind of omniscient narrator that helped explain the motivation of organizational members' communication actions. Most important, I felt authentic—the role of writing stories about communication problems felt right to me and matched the skills I had developed. I had found a way out of the iron cage I had entered in the early 1980s.

Finding my way out of that cage was difficult. The questions I've posed below may help you think about how you frame writing and help you begin a self discovery process if your writing has stalled, you've had a long writing dry spell, or you don't believe in the writing you're doing.

- What metaphors do you use to describe yourself? Do you see yourself as a researcher, social scientist, teacher/researcher, teacher, article writer, or book writer?
- How comfortable are you with those metaphors? Do they feel authentic? Do you feel you've chosen them, or were they primarily chosen for you or imposed on you by the norms of the profession?
- Are these metaphors a burden? Do they invigorate you, weigh you down, represent who you think you are, or create a sense of heavy responsibility? Are there different metaphors that you may feel comfortable with?
- What metaphors do you use to characterize writing articles? Do you see yourself creating new knowledge, finding new knowledge, doing social science, looking for communication truths, solving problems, explaining communication dilemmas, telling stories, or testing hypotheses?
- To what extent is there alignment between the metaphors you use to characterize yourself and the metaphors you use to describe the goals of writing articles?

## **WRITING, TEACHING, AND KNOWLEDGE CREATION**

The reframing of myself as a writer of communication stories had an unanticipated consequence: It transformed how I thought about teaching and how I taught. I now saw my managerial communication course as a narrative or a communication story that I created, not as a course made up of other people's theories, concepts, and models. The communication dilemmas I tried to solve in my writing shaped and reshaped what I taught; and my interaction with classroom learners, who are

experienced military officers with significant professional experience, provided me with additional communication problems or puzzles to solve.

The catalyst that kept the story evolving was the writing I was currently doing. Specifically, I weave my new writings into course readings to enlarge or modify the communication story I tell. Using my own writings as bedrock for the course enables me to create a managerial communication story that makes sense to me, that has a shape and coherence that I can communicate to my learners, that I believe in, and that I feel I own because I have authored it.

In addition, the information I had gathered from organizations while trying to solve these communication puzzles has enabled me to provide learners with the article's back story (the story behind the article's text), that is, problems encountered during subject interviews, alternative ways I considered of analyzing the information, false starts in writing the article, and information I left out because it didn't seem to "fit." Often our discussion of that back story becomes as valuable to the military officers and myself as the article's text. From a richer, more informed context, officers discuss, argue, and debate the data I presented, my analysis of it, and my recommendations.

Furthermore, these back story discussions give learners a different, more human perspective of the articles they read. Rather than seeing an article as a polished piece of truth that seemed to be effortlessly created, they now see an article as a result of an intellectual struggle, the product of at times a messy process, and the article's text as merely one way of describing and analyzing the data.

This newly discovered relationship between writing and teaching has caused me to see writing as something I should and need to do if I'm to be a responsible, engaged teacher. Part of this feeling of responsibility comes from a different understanding of the relationship between writing, teaching, and learning. Prior to my reframing of writing as storytelling and the redefinition of roles I've described earlier, I knew intellectually that writing was a mode of learning, a method of inquiry, but, quite frankly, I did not have that experience often enough. This lack of understanding was partly caused by my experiencing writing as telling or "writing up" what "had been found" within the narrow genre limitations that define the research article. I viewed article writing as a process that led to a product that was tallied in an output box (another line on the resume, another check in the box toward promotion and tenure) rather than a process of discovery, knowledge creation, self-revelation, and professional as well as personal identity formation.

Below I ask a number of challenging questions about the relationship between writing, teaching, and learning I would like you to think about. The questions raise the issue of whether writing is a professional responsibility of everyone who teaches communication and who makes claims about communication theory, strategy, and practice.

- If you are not writing, are you shortchanging your learners, yourself, and your colleagues?

- Do you bifurcate writing from teaching? If so, why? What is the story you've helped construct for yourself that creates that bifurcation?
- To what extent do you depend on the writings and materials of others when designing your courses rather than materials and ideas you yourself have created? Are you the "author" of your course, or do you use the "plot" that others have created for you?
- What ways do you use to test ideas you learn? How do you make public your ideas? How do you ensure to yourself, to your colleagues, and to your learners that your thinking is rigorous?
- How do you incorporate your new ideas into your class materials?
- How do you model the article writing process? Do learners have an idea of the messiness of the process, the learning that goes on within the writer, the tentativeness of the analysis and conclusions in the article, the data that's often left out, and so forth?

### WRITING, INFLUENCE, AND TALK

What gives me extraordinary pleasure is hearing that an instructor is using an article I wrote as a course reading. I don't care if the class or the instructor likes or dislikes the article, points out significant weaknesses in analysis, or believes the analysis is perceptive. The very fact that a group of people read and talk about the article pleases me greatly because in talk there is possibility of learning. Furthermore, those who provide the prompts for learning, who write the articles, exercise some degree of influence and power because the language they chose (albeit those choices are limited by norms and rules) partly defines the structure and content of the conversation. In short, another reason I write is to shape in some small way the conversation about business and managerial communication.

---

This newly discovered relationship  
between writing and teaching has  
caused me to see writing as something I  
should and need to do if I'm to be a  
responsible, engaged teacher.

---

Foucault argues in *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1972) and *Power/Knowledge* (1980) that discourse generates, produces, and transforms our organizational realities. Discourse makes us and the world around us; it is a form of power and control. Fairclough (1992), in a commentary on Foucault, states that discourse systems and the rules that constitute those systems make it possible for certain statements but not others to occur at particular times, places, and locations—our journals, classrooms, conference presentations, and even in conversations with each other.

Although bounded by the content, shape, and form our writing can take, writing provides us with opportunity to alter, perhaps only incrementally, the statements we make about communication and the way in which we make those statements. Writing helps us not only to tell our own story, build our own narrative for ourselves and our business/managerial communication learners, but it also shapes and potentially alters that conversation not only for our professional community but also in the classroom and in management development programs. As Marshak (1998) argues, conversation or discourse about communication influences communication action; it affects, indeed constructs, the way we write, speak, and listen. I believe our membership has the responsibility not to remain mute because those whose written voices shape the conversation also shape us.

### **FINAL OBSERVATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR JOURNAL EDITORS**

Writing is a habit of mind. Because a habit starts with new thinking that leads to different action, the way we frame our thinking is important if we are to develop a healthy, growth-generating writing habit. When we develop a healthy writing habit, our work feels authentic, important, and indeed, necessary. This feeling keeps us writing, despite its difficulty.

On a general level, this story has been about my need to reframe writing from doing research to telling stories about my solutions to communication problems. On a personal level, it's a story about my struggle to overcome writing in bad faith, that is, writing so that I could show others I could do social science or business research, and to develop a healthy writing habit. I am convinced that if I hadn't gone through this struggle, if I hadn't found different metaphors to characterize "research," I would have stopped writing 12 years ago when I received tenure.

I suspect my story, or at least parts of it, is not unique. Its telling, however, may occur during drinks or coffee rather than a public, ceremonial gathering such as the ABC Outstanding Researcher Award plenary session or the pages of this journal. Although this story is not unique, I believe it's important to make it public so that it can be part of our institutional conversation. If this story becomes part of that conversation, then perhaps we can expand the conversation and create other ways to help ABC members find an authentic voice so they will speak on paper.

To help our membership speak on paper, we need help from our journal editors, associate editors, and reviewers. I believe our organization and our journal gatekeepers bear some of the responsibility for how we frame research and why many of us may be silent. The credibility of our discipline has been under attack for many years by academics in mainline management, business, and other university disciplines. To counter those attacks and silence those critics, we have applied to our

journal review process the research norms of the disciplines that doubt the value of our work. In short, we have identified with our aggressors because they would not deride the work of those who are like themselves.

I don't think we've realized the institutional price we have had to pay for embracing social science research norms. In our quest for research acceptance, we may not have created space—psychological and physical space in our journals—for creative ways of describing our ideas about communication and our communicative interactions with our own institutions and organizations we have studied.

I believe if our journals were more experimental in what they published, if they entertained what Richardson (1992) describes as “creative-analytic practice” (p. 372), more of our memberships' voices would be heard—our members would write more—because these other modes of writing create greater possibility of alignment with the talents our members currently have. Furthermore, these other genres of writing provide greater possibility of our members to find a writing role and voice that feels authentic.

---

I believe our organization and our  
journal gatekeepers bear some of  
the responsibility for how we frame  
research and why many of us may  
be silent.

---

Several examples of experimental, creative-analytic writing practice might be dialogues about communication with business leaders, autoethnographic accounts of field studies, cubistic or polyvocal texts about communication issues (e.g., adopting a new communication technology, changing communication norms within an organization), communication stories with analytical glosses embedded within them, interviews of business leaders with analytic commentary, mixed genres, and critical commentaries and other forms of essays or think pieces.

Obviously, writing well within these genres requires skill, craft, discipline, and creativity. Moreover, reading these writings well as an editor, reviewer, student, or field expert requires an open mind, discipline, and careful thought. Finally, creating and telling this story has enabled me to hear more clearly the tone and rhythm of 23 years of my academic work. As I indicated at the beginning of this story, for the past 3 years I've been a full-time administrator trying to harmonize an administrative and academic voice. The telling of this story is helping me decide if both voices can harmonize or if one voice must give way to the other.

## REFERENCES

- Barrett, F. (2003, September 17-20). *Toward an aesthetic of transformative cooperation: Cultivating surrender, wonderment, appreciation, and forgiveness*. Paper presented to the New Designs in Transformative Cooperation conference, Case Western Reserve University, Weatherhead School of Management, Cleveland, OH.
- Barrett, F., & Cooperrider, D. (1990). Generative metaphor intervention: A new approach to intergroup conflict. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 26(2), 223-244.
- DiMaggio, P. J., & Powell, W. W. (1983). The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields. *American Sociological Review*, 48, 147-160.
- Ellis, C., & Bochner, A. P. (2000). Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity: Research as subject. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and social change*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- Fishkin, S. F. (1985). *From fact to fiction: Journalism and imaginative writing in America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Foucault, M. (1972). *The archeology of knowledge*. London: Tavistock.
- Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/knowledge*. New York: Pantheon.
- Levine, D. N. (1985). *The flight from ambiguity: Essays in social and cultural theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Marshak, R. (1998). A discourse on discourse: Redeeming the meaning of talk. In D. Grant, T. Keenoy, & C. Oswick (Eds.), *Discourse and organization*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- McKee, R. (2003, June). Storytelling that moves people. *Harvard Business Review*, 81, 51-55.
- Richardson, L. (1992). The consequences of poetic representation: Writing the other, rewriting the self. In C. Ellis & M. G. Flaherty (Eds.), *Investigating subjectivity: Research on lived experience*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Rose, E. (1992). *The werald*. Boulder, CO: Waiting Room.
- Suchan, J., & Dulek, R. (1988). Toward a better understanding of reader analysis. *Journal of Business Communication*, 25(2), 30-46.
- Suchan, J., & Dulek, R. (1990). A reassessment of clarity in written managerial communications. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 4(1), 87-99.
- Tedlock, B. (2000). Ethnography and ethnographic representation. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.